

## **Street Pastors: From Crime Prevention to Re-Moralisation**

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### **Abstract**

This paper reports on a staged research project conducted in a major city in the south of England. It largely involved an evaluative effort to consider the development, implementation and the perspectives of different key actors about the impact of a local Street Pastors project on areas of the night-time economy (NTE). We first set out the origins of the Street Pastors movement, before describing the methods employed in the research. While early findings are presented the purpose is at this stage to provoke debate and to provide an early commentary for what has far-reaching implications for community safety generally, and even further, for large areas of public policy.

**Key Words:** religion, community safety, public policy, re-moralisation, governance

### **Introduction**

Since this paper was presented at the 2009 Conference the research has moved on a stage, thus what we present here will be slightly different, slightly more advanced, than we were able to produce at that time. Nevertheless, it remains a piece designed to stimulate debate rather than articulate very clear conclusions. Street Pastors is an inter-denominational Christian organisation that actively patrols areas of the night-time economy (NTE). They are visible due to a distinctive uniform and employ outreach methods to make contact with and serve vulnerable groups, offering a range of interventions which are ostensibly secular in nature. Their progress has been remarkable since their inception on 2003, and consequently it would seem an apposite time to consider the implications

of their rapid growth, not only for crime prevention and community safety, but also in terms of the impact of religion on public policy more generally.

We begin with a brief section reflecting on the historical relationship between religion and public policy, which has been an uneasy one in the post-war period as a separation was promoted pushing religious belief further into the private sphere. Clearly, religion has played a major part in social welfare through the voluntary or third sector and continues to do so, but aside from specific areas such as faith schools that receive state sponsorship arguably its role in mainstream service provision has been limited (Moss and Thompson, 2006). Historically crime prevention activities where religious groups have been involved have arguably operated at the welfare end of the continuum. What we see with Street Pastors might be considered a more hard-nosed crime prevention oriented group actively patrolling the NTE. In this respect the Street Pastors initiative may be unique but there is much more to reflect on than simply their novelty factor. The nature of their operation and its timing may well have opened up possibilities for them to play a significant part in local governance using the police service as a convenient conduit. From this point of view it is worth examining the origins of the movement and exploring its development, and the means of that development.

One of the key points of interest is that despite the current importance of establishing an evidence-base for public policy (Wells, 2004), the Street Pastor movement does not have that evidence base. Some grand claims have been made for their impact on anti-social behaviour and violence in the NTE (Norfolk Street Pastors, 2009), but thus far little has been supplied in support of them. At the time of writing, to our knowledge, only one evaluation has been conducted nationally. It was carried out in Portsmouth by a trainee health worker and, with all due respect, does not provide a critical appraisal (Cornish, 2009). We are about to complete a staged research project in a major city in the south of England and it may be the first critical evaluation of the Street Pastor scheme, albeit centred in one location. It is vital therefore that we explain how this research project was undertaken.

It would be premature to set out the findings as the final part of the research has yet to be completed, but we will outline what is emerging and draw out the most serious implications for crime prevention and public policy. As it is the stated purpose of this piece to stimulate discussion, we will conclude by highlighting the most important themes and the most resonant issues. Ultimately, we believe that before further expansion is sanctioned, and more public resources are made available to the Street Pastors, there needs to be a serious and thoroughgoing public debate about the place of religion in public policy, and the appropriateness of using a religious group to supplement the policing of the NTE (if indeed that is what is happening).

## **Religion in Public Policy**

Religion has made a significant contribution to the development of public policy in the UK, arguably with most impact on the practice of social work (Bowpitt, 1998; Fraser, 2002; Thane, 2002; Jordan, 1984). Christian churches have a historical legacy of delivering services, being formative influences and contributing physical and social resources (Orton, 2006). However, the centrality of religion to policy formulation and service delivery began to wane in the early-to-mid part of the twentieth century due to the growing secularisation of society coupled with the influence of critical thinkers such as Marx and Freud (Moss and Thompson, 2006). One of the central issues was the belief that religion had a history of intolerance and oppression that was not consistent with ideals of public welfare (Moss, 2005). It is arguable that the onset of the post-war welfare state meant there was less need for direct church involvement.

However, as in many aspects of social policy the Thatcherite inspired welfare reforms created a space in terms of depth and scope of service provision and this space has been filled by third sector agencies some of which have been faith-based. This process has accelerated with the arrival of New Labour, which has embraced the notion of the mixed economy of welfare, emphasising themes such as freedom of choice (Finlayson, 1999). It also appears to have been driven in part by Christian socialist beliefs (Chapman, 2008). As a result, organised religious groups are increasingly being seen by policy-makers as appropriate providers in delivering public policy. As Lowndes and Chapman (2005: 4) point out:

Engaging faith groups is part of a broader government strategy to mobilise the resources of civil society in pursuit of citizen well-being and better governance. But there is also an assumption that faith groups have special qualities that enable them to play a particular role in civil renewal.

This perhaps reflects the arguments of authors such as Moss and Thompson (2006) that the historic connection between key public policy concepts such as equality and spirituality have been lost and that in order to fully appreciate their meaning and develop a meaningful framework for their pursuit the connection between religion and public policy has to be redrawn.

The way in which it appears to have been redrawn in the view of Lowndes and Chapman (2005: 10) is through three 'in principle' rationales for faith group involvement. These rationales include:

- a normative rationale which is linked to theology and presence in communities;

- a resource rationale, which is focused on organisational capacity – clearly churches have a large number of people and skills at their disposal, and the ability to reach socially excluded groups; and
- a governance rationale, which identifies the representative and leadership capacity within communities and broader networks.

These rationales, if Lowndes and Chapman (2005) are right, are providing a template for the reintroduction of religious involvement in mainstream public policy in the UK.

Of course we are in a period of possible political transition. At present the Conservative Party lead Labour by fourteen clear points in the opinion polls (Sparrow, 2009), therefore, it is worth considering what the future might hold for religious bodies in terms of public policy. During his time as leader William Hague openly espoused a moral agenda underpinned by Christian values. In fact, the Conservative Christian Fellowship was given office space at Conservative Central Headquarters. Furthermore, faith groups were also, along with other voluntary organisations, invited to share their views and experiences. While David Cameron's Broken Society programme consciously avoids the same moral theme, echoing the New Labour language about evidence, the importance of voluntarism remains at its heart. It would seem unlikely despite the less overtly religious overtones the input of faith groups will be limited or curtailed by a Conservative government led by Cameron (Kirby, 2009). At this stage we need to outline what the Street Pastors are, how they came about and the way in which they function as a part of the NTE.

## **The Birth and Development of the Street Pastors**

The Street Pastor project was set up through the Ascension Trust, which was established in 1993 by Reverend Les Isaacs and colleagues in response to what they saw as the increasing economic, social and spiritual deprivation in Britain at that time. The original work of the Ascension Trust was predominantly around gang-related gun crime in inner city London. In 2001 Reverend Isaacs visited Jamaica to investigate how the church was involved in implementing strategies to deal with the disaffected youth involved in gangland culture, this provided the impetus to set up the Street Pastor initiative as a model adapted from the Jamaican experience. In 2002 The Ascension Trust launched a project in five areas of London - Brent, Hackney, Haringey, Lambeth and Southwark - Aston in Birmingham, and inner city Moss Side and Longsight in Manchester. The project was called the 'Guns of our Streets' tour. The overall aims of the tour were to raise awareness of gun crime, to generate practical ways to implement policy to reduce gun crime, to build community relations between the church and the non-church community and to encourage a multi-agency approach to dealing with gun-crime in each of the given areas. According to the Street Pastors Website, apparently a report was written as a result of

consultations and discussions, which led to the setting up of the Street Pastor project in January 2003<sup>1</sup>.

The Street Pastors form an inter-denominational response to neighbourhood problems that seeks, not to preach, but to offer practical based solutions to immediate problems. The Street Pastors use outreach methods to engage with disenfranchised young people and other vulnerable groups. There are both pragmatic and spiritual criteria which have to be satisfied before an individual is selected for Street Pastor status. In terms of the former each person has to pass a Criminal Records Bureau check in order to proceed. The latter requires that recruits to the Street Pastor movement have to be people with a deep faith and a religious-inspired desire to offer practical help within their communities. In this way, Street Pastors accommodate the practical needs of the secular world and the faith-related needs of the religious domain. Once a twelve week training programme has been completed the Street Pastors join a team which patrols the NTE. The Street Pastor teams are visible and wear a uniform which consists of reflective jackets and baseball caps.

The growth of the Street Pastors has been remarkable. At the last count there were over 3,000 individual Street Pastors in the UK, working in more than 100 projects. These stretch right across the country from Aberdeen in Scotland to Camborne in the far south west of England (McGuinness, 2009: 20). It is important to note that whilst the Street Pastors work under the umbrella of the Ascension Trust there is a great deal of local autonomy and arguably any democratic scrutiny of this movement should take place at the local level as it is at this level where agreement to accept the Street Pastors is negotiated.

The Street Pastors' mission statement is to provide an "interdenominational response to neighbourhood problems; engaging with people on the streets and in night-time venues to, listen, dialogue and offer practical help and solutions" (<http://www.streetpastors.co.uk>). Their expressed values are as follows:

- The sacredness and sanctity of human life
- Valuing and honouring the community
- Taking personal responsibility
- Being a person of integrity
- The growth and development of the person to their fullest potential.

Drawn from these values they have two stated aims:

- To develop the project to build capacity and sustainability
- To provide an outreach volunteer service to prevent crime, defuse volatile situations and divert those involved and/or at risk of criminal activity and anti-social behaviour into training, employment and other

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.streetpastors.co.uk/WhatisaStreetPastor/AscensionTrust/tabid/203/Default.aspx>

meaningful and empowering pursuits (Select Committee on Home Affairs, 2006).

What this really indicates is just how far the movement has grown away from its original rationale and arguably its target community. In the first instance it was designed to tackle the problem of gun crime and this mainly amongst the African-Caribbean community in the UK. What we now have is an organisation that seeks to provide wide-ranging welfare-oriented interventions on the streets with 'anti-social behaviour' in mind, notably targeting the problem of binge-drinking.

The local initiative obviously subscribes to the general lead provided by the Ascension Trust; however, it, like all Street Pastors schemes, also enjoys a large degree of autonomy. Partly this reflects their local circumstances and context. The initiative we studies operates in a large city in the south of England, and came into being through the confluence of key interest groups. On the one hand church leaders became aware of the work of the Street Pastors through a national conference of evangelical Christians. This led to one of its founders, Les Isaacs, visiting the city to talk about the scheme at an open forum. A senior police officer happened to be there and was so impressed he elected to champion its introduction to the city. The Base Command Unit Commander then helped to fund its start-up costs. It was universally recognised that in public policy terms the Street Pastors scheme was police sponsored and driven.

Recruits come to the programme through their churches as either nominees or volunteers. They pay a £300 fee to enrol which covers training and the cost of the uniform. The training, as stated above, includes a 12 week programme which has components on sociology, criminology and theology as well as more practical matters such as first-aid and self-defence. Although recruits can accompany patrols before they graduate, they cannot formally become Street Pastors until it is successfully completed.

At the time of the research, the patrols were made on Saturday nights between the hours of 10pm and 4am, they were split into two teams each covering separate areas. Each patrol consisted of between 2-4 people and they were supported via radio link with a group based back at the church - this static group offered the patrols advice, support and prayer. The patrols not only engage with people on the streets, they also make a point of building relationships with shopkeepers, door staff, takeaway proprietors and publicans. The published aims of the Street Pastor group involved in the research are as follows:

- "As a 'presence' ministry from the Christian churches ('the church has left the building')
- As a visible presence to reassure folk who may feel vulnerable
- To help reduce the (alarming) fear of crime that far outweighs the actual reality of the situation

- To be a listening ear to the lonely, the vulnerable, the frightened, the intimidated, the hurting...
- And to offer genuine, non-judgemental pastoral support to those who request help.”

Having described how the Street Pastors began and how they operate, nationally and locally, we now need to outline the research in which we are currently engaged in order to set up themes and issues for wider discussion. First we will describe the scope of the work before going on to outline some of the key emergent findings.

## **The Research**

The data in this paper comes from a two part project conducted in a major city in the south of England. The first part of the study was something of a hybrid in line with the requirements of the Street Pastors scheme and its sponsoring agencies. It involved a process evaluation in which the recruitment and training procedures were investigated, as well its patrol activities. But it also featured a feasibility study aimed at assessing whether an existing Street Pastors group could be moved into a higher risk area of the city’s NTE. This was arguably the more important of the two aspects because of the expansionist ambitions of the initiative.

The second phase of the study, conducted some six months later, was an evaluation driven by the realist imperatives outlined by Pawson and Tilley (1997). In effect, its purpose was to explore how the services’ extension had been received, not by measuring its impact as this is always problematic with outreach work (Barton and Welbourne, 2005), but through the perceptions of key actors. It was commissioned by the local police, a local community group and the Local Authority’s Community Safety Unit in concert with the Street Pastors.

The first part of the research ran from December 2008 to January 2009 and the second part took place in July 2009. The research applied a multi-method approach: documentary analysis, observations, informal and semi-structured interviews and an unstructured focus group. Observations were made of the training sessions provided to the Street Pastors and the authors accompanied patrols to see firsthand how they operate in both NTE areas of the city. Additionally an observation was carried out in the CCTV operations room of the city.

In total ten semi-structured interviews were completed with various actors, some of whom were re-interviewed in the second phase. They included:

- The Managing Director of the Street Pastors scheme
- The scheme’s Coordinator
- The Training Coordinator
- A police Inspector and Street Pastors Director

- The Leader of the City Council
- Three members of the Local Community Safety Unit.

It was originally intended to include beat officers assigned to the second NTE area and other relevant actors in the interview survey. Unfortunately, financial and temporal limitations meant that this was not possible. While this does limit the scope of the study somewhat, nevertheless, in line with most qualitative research the limitations are in the range of perspectives offered not in the number of interviews conducted.

The informal interviews were carried out on four separate evenings the first of which involved door staff in the area. Thirteen pubs and clubs took part and twenty three staff members. The second round of interviews was conducted with takeaway and restaurant owners in nine establishments. Finally, an unstructured focus group was organised with homeless people (ranging from street drinkers to rough sleepers) whilst helping out at a Christmas dinner organised by one of the Police Community Support Officers. Again, in the second phase, some of the same individuals were re-interviewed, with an additional set of informal interviews undertaken with CCTV operators. The stage is now set for some of the early findings to be reported.

## **Key Emergent Findings**

At the outset it is important that we make clear the scope of our reporting. We did not record the informal interviews so we cannot always quote participants. Often the nature of the interviews and their context (undertaken in public during working hours in the NTE) made recording difficult and some respondents actively opposed it. Therefore, some of what we present here will appear in the form of analytical summaries (Barnett and Cain, 2000). There are numerous things we could talk about here, so we have elected to concentrate on the most prominent themes: Intervention, levels of support and the strategic position of the Street Pastors.

### *Intervention*

From the process evaluation component which largely involved observational methods, a number of notable points emerged. Perhaps the most important related to the nature of intervention. One of the guiding principles of the Street Pastors is that they do not intervene unless approached. While on patrol the authors observed that this had implications for the efficacy of the service. In one instance a young man was encountered wearing a dress, he was very drunk and he had clearly been ejected from a nightclub. He also appeared to have no money or indeed any possessions at all, and was completely alone. As they were not asked for help the Street Pastors did not engage with this individual even though he seemed highly vulnerable. In a similar incident an inebriated young woman



who was being violently ill and surrounded by other young people was ignored, while a man who was less drunk and only mildly sick was offered a bottle of water. In addition to the unsolicited help directive Team Leaders are charged with making on-the-spot risk assessments so this may have been another factor.

Presumably, these principles are in place to protect the Pastors and to avoid the perception that they are preaching or moralising. However, it meant in this case that two people in need received no assistance. In a different situation a homeless man was approached briefly and there was a short discussion but no help or practical advice was forthcoming..

#### *Levels of support*

In terms of the feasibility study the most apparent finding was that there was general support for expanding the Street Pastors patrols to the proposed NTE site. Virtually every group we spoke to were tentatively supportive, though it would perhaps be fairer to say they were positively agnostic. It was broadly felt that they probably would not do any harm but that they probably would not do a lot of good either. Having said that activities like litter collection were regarded favourably and there were key things that they might be able to contribute, such as:

- To have some deterrent effect in preventing violent offending
- To bear witness if offences were committed
- To offer assistance to vulnerable young women, and a lot of publicity had been achieved locally because the Street Pastors hand out flip flops to women who are drunk or have broken their heels.

On the other hand there were universally expressed concerns:

- There were fears that Street Pastors would be overwhelmed by the horrors occurring in that part of the city. One respondent said their faith would be sorely tested.

And specific concerns were identified by different respondent groups:

- Several door staff said that Street Pastors might be an added burden; that they would help out but could do without the added responsibility
- Two young homeless men stated that they were generally supportive but that they would not tolerate being preached to, even though we made them aware this was not part of the *modus operandi* of the Street Pastors.

Overall then, although there was tentative backing for the intended expansion, there were also clear reservations. In purely practical terms the clearest outcomes were the removal of litter from the street, the distribution of flip flops and water, and a number of individual and group

interactions. Of course there may also have been a deterrent effect, but this is not something susceptible to measurement.

*The strategic location of the Street Pastors*

Through the semi-structured interviews in particular it soon became apparent that they were not a formal part of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) in the city, despite having a central place in its NTE:

But it is very much an independent role, so they are there to help not to police. And I think we have to respect that division. So while obviously I know that they let the police know when they're out and about. Their role is... they would assist us as they do here as part of community focus week, but that's the limit of what they want to do (Community Safety Officer 1).

The desire for independence and autonomy was echoed by the Leader of the City Council:

On the other hand I think it's got to stay voluntary, we don't want people out there thinking 'Oh this is the council', because some people don't react to the council very well... So we have tried to keep it informal... They know they've got our support for whatever they need... But they want to be independent and that's right.

The head of the Community Safety Unit in the city felt that the Street Pastors scheme ought to be incorporated into the CDRP, but there had been little willingness on their part to integrate themselves more fully into the community safety infrastructure. While the Chair of the Street Pastors maintained that they might be prepared to do so if officially approached, he stressed that they would not be interested if it meant they had to compromise on what they wanted to do.

## **Resonant Themes and Issues**

It is clearly our intention to provide a more thoroughgoing commentary on the Street Pastors scheme in due course, certainly once the research is completed. However, there are critical themes and issues emerging already that we feel require urgent consideration and debate. At a pragmatic level this is in large part about the consistency and coherence of government policy. A central factor which has aroused our interest is the rapidity of the growth of Street Pastors schemes nationally, from six groups in 2003 to the position we see now. The government has continually emphasised, , that public policy should be driven by 'what works' and this requires a constant recourse to evidence:

We will be a radical government. New Labour is a party of ideas and ideals but not of outdated ideology. What counts is what works. The objectives are radical. The means will be modern. Britain will be better with new Labour (Tony Blair, Labour Party Manifesto for the 1997 General Election; cited in Wells, 2009: 1).

And yet, as stated earlier, aside from our work which is yet to be concluded, there is only one completed evaluation of a Street Pastors scheme that we are currently aware of. This was carried out in Portsmouth by a trainee health practitioner, and lacked any critical edge (Cornish, 2009). Street Pastors schemes are growing rapidly in a geographical sense, but also in terms of the areas of public policy they wish to access. The latest development is the establishment of Schools Pastors schemes, where patrols occur after school hours escorting children to bus stops. Eventually they want to get past the school gates and take a greater role in activities like assemblies (McGuinness, 2009).

There is a long tradition within the criminal justice field of seeking evidence to support new policy measures. Aside from the burgeoning amount of academic research in the area, there is also a substantial archive of research evidence available through the Home Office website dating back to 1969 (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pubsintro1.html>). What is apparent is that there has been an acceleration of this process since the arrival of New Labour. While it is clear that the research evidence will be of variable quality, and, there are areas that might require more evidence to be collected, nevertheless, The key question we want to pose is why has such a far-reaching and expansive service been allowed to develop without integral evaluation, to see if it works?

This absence of evidence also has relevance for the role of the Street Pastors in terms of local governance. In terms of crime prevention and community safety the Home Office Circular 8/84 marked the beginning of our current approach to crime prevention as well as marking the genesis of joined-up working within the criminal justice system (Follett 2006: 96) and its delivery being localised (Crawford 1997). From this point, the whole thrust of crime prevention became multi-agency in approach: from Five Towns, through to Safer Cities, on to Morgan, the 1997 Labour election victory and the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act with the requirement on Local Authorities to promote and coordinate Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, which provide an audit of crime within each local authority and a strategy to reduce it.

In 2002 the Police Reform Act extended the responsibility for the formulation and implementation of CDRPs to the Police, the Fire Service and the Primary Care Trusts, thus firmly incorporating health within crime. From here, the 2003 Anti-Social Behaviour Act, the 2004 *Building Communities, Beating Crime* White Paper, the 2005 Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act, the 2006 Respect programme and the Police and Justice Act 2006 all served to allow CDRPs to incorporate more and more organisations into a multi-agency planning and delivery web. As a result,

the CDRPs have attempted to include almost all agencies working within the community in whatever capacity into an essentially crime reductive milieu.

With regard to the Street Pastors while they have demanded significant resources, and have taken on a central role in the NTE (a large part of which relates to community safety), they have no place in the local CDRP and judging by the views of the senior figures in the initiative we have researched this will only happen if it has no impact on their activities. The problem with this is that there is no direct accountability. Again, we need to stop and reflect on this situation: how has this been allowed to happen?

New Labour has had a strong Christian Socialist thread running through it since its inception and this has clearly made an impact on the shape and direction of public policy (Chapman, 2008). Essential public services have been provided for some time by such groups, however we are not aware of a religious group in the UK that has used crime prevention as their *raison d'être* before. When Michael Howard in 1993 raised the possibility of concerned citizens patrolling the streets there was an outcry about vigilantism, not least from the police, and the suggestion was first adapted under the tag-line 'walking with a purpose' and then eventually shelved (Joyce, 2006). Furthermore, at the Labour Party Conference in 1994 John Prescott ridiculed the proposal and said that the Conservatives ought to focus their energies on getting people 'working with purpose', as unemployment continued to rise (Goodwin, 2004). This appears to show that it is religion that provides the vital ingredient.

In making sense of this we can refer back to the work of Lowndes and Chapman (2005). One of the rationales articulated for the involvement of faith-based groups in areas of public policy, specifically urban regeneration, was resource-led. This has two key facets one of which serves the need of central and local government and one serves the needs of the faith-based groups. The first relates to the aims and needs of governments. Faith-based groups have access to significant physical and social resources and can mobilise people, skills, and spaces in the pursuit of public policy and thus present significant, and more importantly, willing, resource bases on which government can draw. From the faith-based groups' perspective engaging with government allows faith-based groups access to practical benefits such as funding, but also less tangible, but arguably more important benefits, such as widespread social acceptance and the ability to influence policy and achieve closeness to power.

While certain sections of the Christian community clearly feel that they are a hunted minority fending off the attention of an 'ignorant secular liberalism' (The Christian Institute, 2009), contradictory evidence suggests that in fact public trust towards the church is relatively high. For instance, a European poll conducted by Ipsos-MORI (2009) this year placed the church near the top of a list of most trusted institutions, and religious personnel as trustworthy on an individual basis. Tentatively supporting this latter evaluation, it was apparent during our research that the Street Pastors

were trusted almost implicitly because they were religious. Only one doorman asked whether they have to be registered. As it happens they are CRB checked. However, no-one questioned the right of the Street Pastors to be doing what they are doing.

Reflecting back to the framework set out by Lowndes and Chapman (2005) once again, another rationale for faith-based public policy activity revolves around governance. This makes reference to representation and leadership; indeed the Home Office (2003: 22) notes that, 'the leadership role of faith groups involves developing the skills and confidence of members to play an active role in society'. This is something the Street Pastors may well be happy to provide:

I hope to see a city that values its neighbourhoods, and partying, and commercial and family, and ethnicity and cultural life in a whole higher way, in a less selfish way, and in a way that allows for a more corporate image across the City. This is a massive statement and would imply that there isn't that at the moment. I believe there isn't that at the moment, the City has a very self-centred attitude, and within society generally. I want to see people start valuing human life, not taking things for granted, not sticking their heads in the sand when things get tough, a lot less addiction – alcohol, which is the key drug at the moment here – and with a little bit more sensibility...I think there is a spiritual inquiry generally, may not be Christian, or Islam, but a spiritual inquiry nonetheless, where can you ask the questions, the fact we are out on the streets and not hidden – we are just there. It gives people permission to bring out their spiritual inquiry in a non-threatening way on their own turf (Street Pastors Coordinator).

As stated above, one of the reasons religion was separated out from the planning and delivery of public policy was its association with intolerance and oppression (Moss, 2005). It would be wrong to connect the Street Pastors with terms such as these, but there may be a uniformity of vision, a desire to see society moulded into a shape that better fits with their ideals. This seems to be the leadership they are eager to provide. While the Street Pastors are very keen to distance themselves from preaching to people in the NTE, they are drawing attention to their faith simply by being on the streets. What is more, if what is really sought is not what is set out in the stated aims and objectives of the initiative, but is really to re-moralise society, then this is something that needs to be debated openly and honestly in a forum which is transparent and democratic.

In the current political climate it no doubt seems attractive to central government policy-makers who have promoted the re-moralization of society and a fashion a new sense of 'Britishness'. In some communities, particularly ethnic minority communities, religious groups provide an organised form of leadership which purports to represent the community. However, care is needed in taking this at face value as representatives are

often self-selected and do not always truly represent the diverse nature of communities (Johns, 2006). The links between this and wider debates about citizenship can be detected in the work of commentators such as Goodhart (Barton and Johns, 2005). However, Farnell et al. (2003) note that taking such claims at face value can be problematic as it can enable negative attributes to emerge, such as simplification, distortion and controlling strategies. It also appears to run counter to the promotion of Britain as a diverse society, which has also been a central plank of the New Labour agenda (Johns, 2004, 2005, 2006). With serious matters like diversity at stake, it is apposite that the place of religion in general, and that of the Street Pastors in particular, should be openly debated in civil society.

## **Conclusion**

What we have attempted to do here is to present a piece designed to stimulate a debate about the shape and nature of public policy and the appropriate role for religion. For some time religion has arguably been seen as tangential to the achievement of mainstream public policy goals. This is now changing, and with a government driven by neoliberal values and a particular brand of Christian Socialism it is changing quite quickly. There are a number of rationales for the involvement of faith-organisations modelled by Lowndes and Chapman (2005) that appear to have gained acceptance. The case of the Street Pastors illustrates just how rapidly a voluntary organisation fuelled by faith can spread. This transcends geography and they are now branching out into other areas of public policy, though community safety is still the dominant thread.

When we look at the government's policy agenda it is clear to see that the Street Pastors fulfil several important criteria for engagement. They derive from the third sector and have faith on their side. Faith – as we have seen – can carry you a long way with this government, but also has real resonance with the general public and any prospective Conservative government. Faith-based groups and people are trusted and seen to be inherently good. They also appeal through the dual lenses of resource and governance rationales: they have large numbers of willing volunteers, facilities and expertise, and, a desire to provide moral leadership.

However, there is a paradox here which lies at the heart of the governmental project for public policy. First, the evidence-base for the efficacy of Street Pastors schemes does not exist. Second, they are operating – at least in some areas – outside the accepted framework for ensuring community safety. And third, and most importantly, the promotion of faith-based groups, Christian or otherwise, has serious implications for diversity and democracy, two concepts that New Labour have championed stridently since their election. On this basis we suggest that the time is ripe for a full and thorough debate to take place about the role of religion in public policy, not only for society at large, but also for the benefit of those religious organisations that wish to be involved.

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